

Eulogy for Ray Goldberg

by Henry Goldberg

**Edmonton Jewish Cemetery
Edmonton, Alberta
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I'm Ray's son, Henry. I'd like to give a eulogy for my father, who passed away on August 29th. It will be a brief biography of his life, and the meaning it had for those close to him. His life was truly a heroic struggle and adventure that I actually believe could have been made into a very interesting and significant book or movie. I will tell you the elements of his story, so we can all thing about that today and honour him.

My father, whose first name was Rafael, was born in 1922 in Dembica, a small town near Krakow, in Poland. The Goldberg family had lived in Poland for hundreds of years. He lived with his father (Maurice), mother (Fella), older brother (Henry), two sisters (Hena and Dvorah), and grandfather or Zaida. His father owned a lumber company and liquor store. My father was very proud of his family – he used to tell me stories about them. He had a very happy childhood.

All that was shattered in 1939, when the Nazis invaded Poland. His parents never expected the Nazis to invade, and did not want to flee and give up everything they and preceding generations had built in Poland. When the Nazis came, his father sent him and his brother into the countryside to escape, but he and his brother eventually came back, thinking things would be all right.

Things didn't work out that way. The Nazis took him and his brother to work camps. His father was a very well respected person in the community, and was able to bribe the German soldiers initially to get them out. His father, who was a big, strong man, had various encounters with the Nazis, and did his best to survive and keep the family going under very difficult circumstances.

Eventually, my father and his brother were taken to major concentration camps. My father never saw the rest of his family again. His mother and father were in their 40's, and his sisters were only 11 and 9 years old. They were all killed by the Nazis, but my father did not know how.

My father and his brother spent the next 6 years together in concentration camps, or death camps as some call them. That was ages 17-23 for my father. They went through 7 concentration camps in Poland and Germany, including Auschwitz, where my father got a tattooed ID number on his arm, and Bergen-Belsen. Those 6 years were filled with extreme hardship and danger. I used to ask my father to tell me about his experiences in

the camps, and he told me what went on. I will relate to you a few examples that stand out in my mind.

He spent 2 weeks standing in the crowded cattle car of a train with other Jews being transported to a concentration camp. They had barely any food or water, and people were dying around him. He worked for years at hard labour with little food, wearing lice-infested clothes, and sometimes in bare feet in the middle of winter. One time, a Jewish man escaped from a work group of Jews that my father was with. The Nazis decided that they would shoot all the Jews as punishment. The Nazi commander was walking through the line of Jews, and liked my father's looks, so he asked him "What skills do you have?". My father answered in fluent German, which he had learned growing up, that he was a mechanic, because he knew they needed mechanics, even though he really wasn't one. The Nazi commander took my father out of the line, and they shot everyone else. My father had to bury all of them. My father also worked underground for long periods at the Nordhausen concentration camp, where V-2 rockets were made.

In 1945, he and his brother were in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany. They were both very weak and ill after 6 years of hardship and deprivation. When the British army liberated the camp, his brother's system could not handle the food they gave him, because he hadn't eaten properly for so many years. My father found him on a pile of dead bodies.

Rafael Goldberg was a holocaust survivor in the most profound sense of the term. He survived what few people could have survived. My father was the only one of his family to survive the holocaust. Except for being barely alive, he had nothing else: no family, no possessions, no money, no home, no country. The Red Cross offered the Jewish holocaust survivors the opportunity to live in Sweden. My father went there, even though he didn't want to leave his brother in Bergen-Belsen because he hadn't been buried.

He was very ill with pleurisy. He spent a year in hospital in Sweden recovering. He lived in a city called Orebro. My father finished high school, actually a trade school, in Sweden. He learned Swedish, and played on a soccer team. Eventually, he ended up meeting my mother, Trudy, at a party. My mother, who was from Czechoslovakia, was also a holocaust survivor. She was the only one from her family to survive. So they had a lot in common, both starting over again with no family or possessions. It seems to me it was quite a love story. They were married in Sweden in 1950.

My father and mother decided that they wanted to live somewhere where they could truly feel that they were equal citizens with full opportunity, which they did not think they would have in Sweden with its homogeneous population. They applied for immigration to Canada, and were accepted. They took the Queen Elizabeth ship from England to Canada in 1951. They landed in Saint John, New Brunswick, and were told that the opportunities were greatest in Western Canada. So they took the train from there to Winnipeg. They stayed in Winnipeg for a few weeks, but decided to move on to Edmonton.

Early on after their arrival in Edmonton, my father was interviewed for an article that appeared in the Edmonton Journal, as a representative displaced person (as they called them) who had survived Europe's death camps to come to Canada. My mother was pregnant with me at the time. In the article, my father said that he appreciated the opportunity to build a new life and family in Canada, and couldn't complain about anything here. He was proud of the new nickname he had received here, "Ray". He learned English from reading newspapers and talking to people – it was his fifth language.

I was born in 1952. My father named me after his brother, Henry, and my middle name after his father, Maurice. My sister, Jane, was born in 1957. My parents had started a new family again.

My father had a few odd jobs, and then worked for Dollar Cleaners (offered a job by Mickey Dlin), eventually becoming manager of their plant. In 1957, he took the entrepreneurial step and risk of starting his own business, called Hygienic Laundry & Shirt Service. Hygienic did the shirts and laundry on a wholesale basis for many of the dry cleaners in Edmonton. My father worked very hard and long hours running the business, and was successful at it. My mother helped him by doing the books. I worked there myself some summers. He always emphasized productivity, quality, and having good relationships with his customers. I learned a lot about business watching him.

He and my mother provided an excellent home and complete love and support for my sister and I as we grew up. We always knew that they put us first, before anything else.

My father always tried to teach me about life from his experiences. He had a realistic view of human nature, but was not bitter from what he went through. He emphasized to me the importance of an education, which was something he knew could never be taken away from you. He also placed a great deal of importance to me on being ethical, realizing the discrimination against Jews in Europe, accusing them of being unethical. He did not want that again in Canada for his children or himself. On the other hand, if he felt insulted by someone, he was not afraid to speak out – he was very sensitive about being treated with the same respect that he gave others.

My father was a constant source of support for my sister, myself, and our families. He was the backbone of our extended family. He helped me through some very difficult times, and always backed us 100 percent. His grandchildren, Janie's children, Corey and Derek, and my children, Deena, Paul, and Michael, all called him "Papa". He was a strong, loving, father figure for all of them, even at the end, when he was ill. Clearly, none of us would be here if it weren't for his will to survive and build a family again.

My mother passed away tragically from ALS in 1976. My father later re-married to Shirley. I know that my father had a very strong marriage with Shirley. They were very happy together. My father enjoyed the practice of various Jewish customs and religious activities with her, as well as their trips to Europe and Israel. Shirley is a great cook, and my father literally loved eating everything she prepared. We all enjoyed that whenever

she had us over. Shirley took great care of my father. I want to say a special thanks to Shirley and Janie for their tireless efforts to help my father at the end when he was ill and in the hospital. They should both be blessed for that. I also want to thank Hersh, Jay, and Dia, for all their support of him.

Even with all the incredible hardships and cruelty that he endured in his life, my father always had an optimistic attitude. He was full of love for his wives, his children, his grandchildren, and Canada, and Edmonton. He enjoyed telling you a good joke whenever the opportunity arose. Many of you may remember him singing at various weddings and Bar Mitzvahs. He sang beautifully, with feeling and with the joy of living. He never gave up. He was strong, honest, dedicated, and a truly great man, right to the end.

Dad, we all miss seeing your warm smile, thick gray hair, and loving eyes. We all loved you with all our hearts. We will miss you and keep you in our thoughts forever. Your example will bring us strength and courage!

God bless you always.